

World's worst taste could save lives

Scientists have discovered the worst taste in the world — a substance so bitter that just smearing the trunks of maple trees turns their syrup too foul to eat.

Child safety experts, who are understood to be studying the revolting substance, are hoping it may save many youngsters' lives from the thousands who suffer after accidents in the home.

Tests have shown that dropping as little as a dash of the horrid flavouring into a swimming pool-size tank of water makes even the driest drinker stay thirsty. Adding the nasty but non-toxic taste to hazardous household chemicals, such as bleach, may stop children from swallowing potentially lethal doses, it is hoped.

Mel Blum, one of the scientists who have unearthed the flavour, says: "It has a terrible

lingering taste." Although the exact formula is being kept secret, Blum and his co-worker Gary Hollander say the basic substances are the artificial sweetener, saccharin, and a chemical called denatoniun benzoate.

They stumbled across the foul taste during a chemical-weapons warfare research programme aimed at finding a substance that would make an enemy's crops inedible but leave soil unharmed.

The researchers believe that their horrid taste, Vilex A apart from protecting children from poisoning, could help alcoholics trying to wean themselves off drink. "We are looking at one or two other ideas as well," Blum, who works for Atomergic Chemicals, of Farmingdale, New York, said. "This substance is so horrid that it might also make a good shark repellent."

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